

CPS REFORM WATCH

CPS Reform Watch describes the progress made in implementing the reforms outlined in Governor Janet Napolitano's Action Plan for Reform of Arizona's Child Protection System and included in legislation passed during the 2003 special session. This monthly bulletin also is available on the Department of Economic Security's website at www.de.state.az.us and on the Governor's website at www.governor.state.az.us.

March 2004

April is Child Abuse Prevention Month! – Child Abuse Prevention Councils throughout Arizona will host events throughout the state to increase public awareness and to advocate for effective programs and policies to prevent child abuse and neglect. Since 1991, the Department has supported the regional councils, which are comprised of community representatives from the professional, business and civic sectors who volunteer their time to address the need for child abuse prevention in their community.

Boys & Girls Clubs Partnership – On March 30, an exciting partnership between DCYF and the Arizona Alliance of Boys and Girls Clubs of America was announced. To help address the social, recreational and educational needs of abused and neglected children, Boys and Girls Clubs throughout the state will admit, free of charge, all children in foster care and other out-of-home placements supervised by CPS. This partnership will help our most vulnerable children to achieve their full potential by giving them a safe place to learn and grow. The after-school tutoring, homework help and computer labs also will help children whose education is often disrupted when they are removed from homes. It will also provide a place where children can establish healthy and nurturing relationships with caring, adult professionals who can serve as mentors and positive role models.

Maximize Federal Reimbursement for Medical/Dental Services Provided to Foster Children – Action 4.1 in the Action Plan for Reform of Arizona's Child Protection System directed Child Protective Services and the Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System to maximize Medicaid reimbursements for children in the foster care system; the goal was to increase the percentage of foster children who qualify for Title XIX reimbursement from 80 percent to 90 percent. That goal has been reached and exceeded! Staff identified and implemented improvements – including updating the computer system to more efficiently process enrollment applications and periodic reviews of non-eligible children to see if changing circumstances had now made them eligible – in order to achieve this success.

AHCCCS and DCYF will be hosting a series of focus groups and stakeholder surveys to identify recommendations related to the delivery of health care services, both physical and behavioral, to foster children. These will occur April 19, 22, 26 and 28 at four locations in the state: Tucson, Flagstaff, and in the east and west parts of Phoenix. Community residents, CPS field representatives and stakeholders have been invited to participate.

Mentoring Program for Foster Youth – Foster youth transitioning into adulthood and out of the foster care system need critical supports to connect them to educational, job placement, health care, housing and community resources. An overview of "In My Shoes", a peer mentoring project matching foster care alumni mentors with youth in care, was presented as one model that has been active in Pima County. This is a collaborative project with Casey Family

Programs, DES, AVIVA volunteer organization, Vision Mark, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, the Pima County Juvenile Court and current and former foster youth. In addition, other mentoring approaches such as group mentoring and mentoring in specific areas like employment and education are being discussed. The focus is on the need to build an adequate infrastructure with resources to ensure success of youth transitioning out of foster care. Gaps in services are being identified and information on district specific resources will be gathered. Youth in care and former foster youth are being encouraged to participate with a goal of creating their own non-profit organization through grants from private foundations, businesses, and other community resources.

Community Network Teams – DES Director David Berns has met with Community Network Teams in 10 of the 15 counties. These teams, comprised of community leaders, service providers and clients, have been asked to submit a written plan by July 2004 to the DES Director identifying existing services, resources and family supports within their respective communities. This includes identifying gaps in services and how the community proposes to provide services and enhance the support of children's needs in their communities. Each CNT is facilitated by a Director's Representative who has been trained in Asset-Based Community Development and will assist their teams with that process. Representatives from the Governor's Economic Security Council also have agreed to provide peer support to the teams. Input from these teams will be critical, not only to the success of efforts to reform CPS, but with the overall goal of improving the lives of all Arizonans through greater integration of services, maximization of resources and improved outcomes.

Stipends and Recruitment of Additional CPS Staff – Staff from the Department of Administration (ADOA), DES Office of Personnel Management and the Division of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) have implemented the stipend for CPS caseworkers, program specialists and program supervisors who submitted verification of their Master of Social Work Degrees. The stipend was implemented on the March 19 pay date. Testing is expected to begin in April for CPS employees who use a second language in their jobs.

DES staff have been aggressively recruiting additional case managers. Between January and March, 67 case managers were hired. Twenty-nine (29) of these positions were to fill vacancies; 38 of these were new positions funded by HB 2024. This number is on target with the hiring plan established during the special session. The Division plans to hire between 21 and 23 case managers each month through June, which will achieve the goal of 104 additional case managers by the end of the fiscal year.

Jury Trials for Severance Hearings – As of March 31, three jury trials have been held in severance cases, two in Pima County and one in Maricopa County. In all three cases, the juries granted a verdict in favor of terminating parental rights. This action frees the children for adoption to safe, permanent homes. There are 36 additional cases statewide in which parents have requested jury trials for severance hearings.

Open Courts Pilot Program – In legislation passed during the special session, the Open Court Pilot was expanded to include all Arizona counties. Information on the process and documents used to implement the Maricopa pilot have been shared with some judges in all counties. Staff from the Division of Children, Youth and Families and the Attorney General's office are working with the courts to ensure that the pilots are implemented and evaluated according to the statute. So far, pilot programs have been started in Cochise, Graham, Greenlee and Yavapai counties; Coconino and Pima counties are expected to begin their pilot programs in April. Maricopa County also has expanded its pilot program from two judges to four in the East Valley.

May is Foster Care Appreciation Month! – Plans are under way for events throughout the state to recognize foster parents and social workers for the invaluable support they give to abused and neglected children. More information on those events will be included in the next edition of CPS Reform Watch.

Implementation of the recommendations in the Governor's Action Plan, legislative changes that occurred during the 2003 Special Session, and other efforts to improve the state Child Protective Services system are coordinated through a statewide network of action teams. These teams include representatives of the Division of Children Youth and Families, as well as Department of Economic Security staff from services such as Family Assistance, Employment Services and Developmental Disabilities. Most importantly, these teams include dozens of neighborhood leaders and community-based organizations working in partnership with state officials to keep kids safe.